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Labors of Love

We have two homes to show our readers this month. One from the lake country of the northern Midwest, and another from the island of Oahu in Hawaii. What they have in common is construction that is more than just another pretty place. Each is an individual statement about how one's home intersects with the world. Hopefully as the projects evolve we will get more pictures and stories to share!



The house is my personal home under construction in Eau Claire, (French for Clear Water) Wisconsin - about 90 minutes due east of Minneapolis / St. Paul. This is our primary residence, and is in essentially an urban setting within minutes of shopping malls and major medical centers. We were fortunate to find 3 low bank waterfront lots along the Eau Claire River, totaling 340 frontage feet.

Mike Marthaler of Mike's Custom Homes is my general contractor. (This delivery is your PO# B 6947 dated 4/07/05). It was designed by Cheryl Fosdick, (<http://cfdesignltd.com>) an architect located in Duluth, Minnesota, along the beautiful north shore of Lake Superior. It was her recommendation to use Bear Creek Lumber as a possible source for the siding.

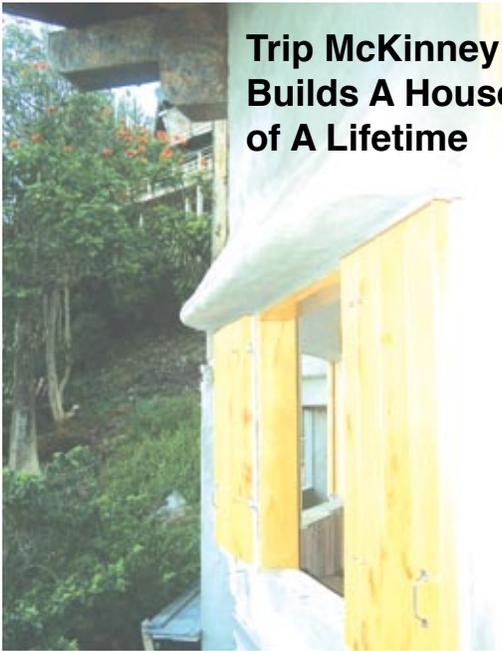
I am an interior designer, so I was looking for an architect with a little more vision for our home. Frequently published, I had followed Cheryl's work since the early 90's. She surprised us with this design, which poetically alludes to the waterfront setting. The engineering of the living room is the same as with a ship - there is a center "Keel" beam and "ribs" forming the skeleton of a hull. The ceiling slopes mimic a wave pattern. I'll try to send images which better describe some of this imagery.

The first photos I sent had the big "upside down" roofs, which could be interpreted as debris which has tumbled down the river, or could be sails on a land ship. These are sided in your Pacific Cypress. Underneath this is the master bedroom, which is contained in a "vessel" form. We haven't yet figured out what type of siding to use along this curving form, so there maybe another order coming in to you yet. I'll keep you posted. Jon Mark Thorpe (thorpe.jon@charter.net)

Above and left: Dick Dalmann Trucking delivers a number of orders for Bear Creek Lumber and our customers couldn't be happier! Dick brings his eastern Oregon sunshine along wherever he travels.

Note the forklift that is unloading Dick's truck. Unloading arrangements are the customer's responsibility to provide when an order arrives by truck.

Trip McKinney Builds A House of A Lifetime



The original theory was to complete the house in five years, move in, and build all the furniture. That idea was fifteen years ago. Such dreamers we were.... so young and foolish.
-Trip McKinney



Look closely high up, and you will see the copper sheathing on the double beam that sticks outside the wall. A dear friend who is a world-renowned artist did this for us. He is from India, and there is a documentary movie (as well as books, articles, etc.) about his work. When you fly into Honolulu International, his huge bronze wall art is hard to miss.

When I asked Trip McKinney of Hononlulu HI to share some photos of his ever evolving home, he gave me these fasinating observations and wonderful photos. Bear Creek Lumber red and yellow cedar can be seen throughout.

This (above) is my favorite shot (except that it shows the little wooden home we live in while building the big house). It is taken from the "Pig Deck".

Hawaii has many wild pigs, and our valley is full of them. While doing the land clearing and foundation digging, I encountered many a surprised pig napping in the early hours. They squeal; I squeal; and we depart rapidly in opposite directions. They come down from their daytime caves to feed at night. Early in the morning, they wander back to the safety of their homes. They bring the whole family.... sometimes all their friends too. So, early in the morning you can fix your coffee and quietly sit on the "Pig Deck" (8' x 10') just off the kitchen and watch the wild pig parade.

The photo is obviously back up hill and shows our home. It also shows the African Tulip trees that block our view from the development in the valley. Note the steep slope we had to build on....

The first thing you will notice are the massive Alaskan Yellow Cedar hurricane shutters. This pair is outfitted with Stainless steel hardware. They too have copper caps. Also seen is our way of putting "eyebrows" above the windows. This keeps driving rain from running down the wall and coming inside. This way it just "water-falls" off the eyebrow. They are hard to make so that they shed the water correctly. But we like the look as well as the cute waterfall.

I found another detail of the main entry door jamb area (see picture on right). The nice wood color shows. Also the recess cuts to receive the door. As you look outside, you can see our rock piles. Throughout the entire process, we have saved every rock that we dig up. We sorted them by type and color. We use them for the walkways, steps, retaining walls, and such.



This shot (above) looks back into the dining room and along the south exterior wall. This door jamb is about 9" thick. It contains over 30 pieces of wood. It also took me about two weeks to do. Above the door is an arch for a piece of art. We found this lady who gets copies of artwork from museums all over the world. The piece that goes here (we just received it last week), is a cast of an Italian Renaissance piece done by Andrea Della Robbia {1435-1525}. The arch (light stones) is made of 19 individually cut pieces of limestone and sandstone. That was hard. The blue background area is colored stucco. Not so hard. The long gray base is poured concrete.

The exterior door will be a heavy metal "fire door". It will rarely be closed, except for hurricanes and freak storms. A stainless steel screen door opens inward to the dining room. The house is very secure. No need to worry about strangers. But if you do hear something, there are numerous "panic" switches that will flood light around the perimeter. All the screen doors are gorilla proof. And the doors, riot proof. Then there are the dogs and gargoyles....

To the right are dual brass rings that could be used to hang a clothesline, flag, or whatever. We fly a lot of flags around here. The shutters are hinged to fold inward. Again stainless steel fittings. These are the largest/heaviest ones we built. Again too, are the concrete sills. We have not yet finished the stucco work below these windows.



Inventory News

Soaring Home Prices Send Building Materials Costs Higher

Home prices rose more quickly over the past year than at any point since 1980, a national group of Realtors reported yesterday, raising new questions about whether some local housing markets may be turning into bubbles destined to burst.

With mortgage rates still low and job growth accelerating, the real-estate market is defying yet another round of predictions that it was on the verge of cooling. The number of homes sold also jumped in April, after having been flat for almost a year.

Nationwide, the median price for sales of existing homes, which does not factor in newly built ones, rose to \$206,000 last month, up 15.1 percent over the past year and breaking the \$200,000 level for the first time, the National Association of Realtors said. Adjusted for inflation, the median price -- the point at which half cost more and half cost less -- has increased more than a third since 2000.

Prices continue to rise most rapidly in the places where they are already highest, including Florida, the Boston-Washington corridor and along the West Coast. In the late 1980s, a typical house in San Diego cost about as much as two typical houses in Syracuse, N.Y., according to the Realtors association; today, somebody could buy six Syracuse houses for the price of one in San Diego.

Prices have jumped most sharply over the past year in the West -- up 21 percent from a year earlier, compared with an increase of 14 percent during 2004. Price increases also accelerated in the Midwest, to almost 13 percent, while they remained roughly similar in the Northeast at 16 percent, and the South, where they are up about 8 percent compared with a year earlier.

The steady decline in mortgage rates over the past three months has helped spur sales of both new and existing homes to record levels in April.

A U.S. industry report detailing the rising cost of building materials is not surprising to homeowners who've toured aisles in neighbourhood hardware stores or home centres.

Prices are up for everything from wood to drywall. It means project budgets will be stretched a little further, and homeowners may need to scale back on the quality of some items.

According to the National Association of Home Builders, material prices rose nearly 10% for the year ending in February. The NAHB report cites high demand for materials due to strong housing construction as one factor behind price spikes. For example, recent lumber prices averaged \$402 per 1,000 board feet. That compares to \$289 in April of 2003.

Costs for much-used plywood, or oriented strand board soared have also increased. Both were in the \$6-\$8 range, wholesale, in the spring of 2003, but now sell for nearly \$12. The cost bumps are significant: nearly 300 sheets are used to build the average new home. This increases construction expense by a whopping \$2,000, according to NAHB.

Remodellers can breathe a bit easier because most won't use significant quantities of materials. Still, if you pay a couple of bucks more for materials up and down the line, pretty soon you're talking real money.

While there's no escaping higher prices, homeowners can manage the amounts they spend and, still achieve a product close to their expectations.

Some remodelling and interior design pros suggest that if budget dollars are tight, spend most on items that you touch or are visibly significant. Conversely, you might spend less on items that remain unseen. For example, you might indulge in finer faucet hardware, but scrimp on plumbing by rigging PVC rather than copper pipe. Using high grade lumber in visible locations such as trim, flooring, decking and siding is a good example of spending your money where it will show and speak the best for your project.

In times of escalating prices, you may want to be super-accurate on your material needs rather adopt budget-busting ballpark estimates. Your best tool in cost containment may be your tape measure. Make sure you accurately measure all dimensions for every aspect of the job; lumber, pipe, wire, flooring, etc.

Once precious materials are on site, the adage of "measure twice, cut once" will

more than prove itself true. Measure - and re-measure - both the location where the materials are to be used and the material itself prior to cutting.

Take care of materials with proper storage so nothing is lost to the weather!

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